CAPTAIN GEORGE'S

Penny Dreadful

TORONTO, MAY 1, 1981 NUMBER 636

UPTOWN

TODAY

And All Next Week

It's Drama Aflame.

"RESURRECTION"

A Sublime Story of Humanity set against the glittering background of Russia under Czarist rule.

WITH
ROD LA ROCQUE
AND
DOLORES DEL RIO

1927

A WEEKLY REVIEW

DON MILLER

A PENNY SAVED: Back a while there came a riposte concerning the quality of Ronald Reagan's B-pics. I think the movie in mind was Code of the Secret Service, and it was said to be "incredibly cheap." The basis for this accusation was a chase scene wherein Reagan hides underwater, and the makers inserted a stock shot of Paul Muni doing the same thing in I Am A Fugitive, thus doubling for Reagan via library footage, saving the star a ducking and the director some additional shooting. Okay, this isn't exactly the way to win awards for production excellence. On the other hand, it certainly plumbs no depths of miserly moviemaking, either. Cheap? Yes. Incredible? Not hardly. Show you what I mean, keeping it in context.

Code of the Secret Service was released May 27, 1939. A few days later, on June 2, Republic released one with a title that was guaranteed to make every kid within range glow with anticipation, S. O. S. Tidal Wave. What's more, it featured the perennial "Dick Tracy," Ralph Byrd. And judging from what was glimpsed in the coming attractions, there's this huge tidal wave that envelops and destroys New York City, so let's not miss this one! Of course, the movie turns out to be a soggy story about a television crusader (in 1939!) opposing crooks, and said crooks telecast a faked film of a tidal wave to scare voters away from the polls. To make matters worse, the special effects footage was cribbed from a 1933 pic, Deluge. By comparison, Muni immersed is but a drop in the bucket.

Let us continue. On September 1, 1939, Universal unveiled the first in a series of action adventures co-starring Richard Arlen and Andy Devine. The teaming had been well publicized, with emphasis upon the action content. Of course, the title, Mutiny on the Blackhawk, was a bit reminiscent of Mutiny on the Bounty, but no matter. Sixty-six minutes after the Universal trademark whirled around, however, the original high hopes were somewhat befogged, if not dashed. The story began literally at sea, leading to a mutiny on a slave ship, and so much for the title. Suddenly the scene somehow shifts to Old California, and the ex-mutineers and slaves are all enmeshed in fighting the Mexicans! As future Arlen-Devine films would attest, plots were merely excuses to employ as much stock footage as possible, in this case sequences from Sutter's Gold and The Rebel. A trade review of the time summed it up nicely: "The reason this short synopsis sounds jumbled is simply because what goes on is jumbled."

Finally, Geronimo! was officially released January 12, 1940, but shown as early as November, 1939. Paramount sold it as a big production, and it

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

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C.B. STRACHAN/ OUR MAN IN EDINBURGH

If the film You're a Sweetheart should happen to show up on the box, watch for the scene where George Murphy accidentally banged his head.

Recently one of our local communities held a Salute to the Thirties, which included a film show presented by the Vintage Film Club from nearby West Lothian. Guest of honour was a chap named John Vicary, an Englishman and founder of the Alice Faye Appreciation Society. John is quite serious about his hobby, and travels to Hollywood every year and has the pictures taken with Alice to prove it. He also owns quite a display of records, posters and lobby cards.

Apparently John got the story about the above-mentioned film from Alice herself and prior to screening the film he told it. Seems that Fox were shooting the big fire scene for In Old Chicago, during which time Universal borrowed Miss Faye for You're a Sweetheart. During the number Scrapin' the Toast, while dancing on a table George Murphy fetched the back of his head a resounding thump on a low doorway. The scene then continues as if nothing had happened, as there was reputedly no time for re-takes.

John Vicary regards State Fair (1962) as Alice Faye's last film until The Magic of Lassie. "How about Won Ton Ton?" I asked. I guess it was bite-your-tongue time as he replied, "Well, we don't count that!" Fair enough.

* * *

BBC-TV won out over ITV in the bidding for GWTW -- snapping the film up for 9½ million dollars. The bidding began (in Los Angeles) at around 3 or 4 million, I believe. This was no doubt to discourage triflers or window shoppers and it certainly put me out of the picture right away. The film will probably be shown around Xmas.

Meanwhile, on the big screen, POPEYE opened at the Odeon on a Sunday afternoon. Patrons were admitted to this first showing FREE in exchange for a coupon available in the local paper. Previous films shown on this basis -- Tribute and 9 to 5. Both died at the box-office. Incidentally, Popeye star Robin (Mork) Williams was born not in outer space but right here in Edinburgh (what d'you mean it's the same thing?).

DON MILLER continued

received top bookings and playing time throughout the country. Reviews were generally favorable, and nobody objected to the majority of the footage consisting of generous portions of The Plainsman and The Texas Rangers, not particularly well disguised. Nor was the story remarked upon as a blatant revamping of Lives of a Bengal Lancer, moved from India to Indians.

There have been even more notorious pecuniary tightenings in movie history, but the present examples occurred in tandem, and prove Bryan Foy wasn't the only producer-piker in Hollywood.

PETE HARRIS

WINGHAM WINGDING: With the strains of the theme music from John Ford's The Searchers running incessantly through their brains, three intrepid members of the Toronto Serial Society set out last Saturday on an odyssey that would take them to that far distant land known as Huron County, and that semi-annual whoop-up called the Wingham Film and Nostalgia Festival.

Pointing their trusty steed's nose away from the rising sun, and shaking the big city dust from their boots, the doughty little party forged ever onward, pausing only to replenish their supplies, but with their minds always on their goal. On they struggled, attempting the decipher the mysterious hieroglypics left by those who had passed before ("What sign say?" "It say 100 km." "Hmmm."). Ignoring the jibes of rustic wiseacres ("Why don't you try reading that map right side up?"), the merry little band, laughing at the mere thought of going without food, pushed on, leaving those back-forty buffoons coughing in their exhaust fumes.

Finally, the great moment came -- "We're lost." "We're not lost, it's Wingham that's lost." And then, the outskirts of Wingham ... a triumphal ride down the main drag to the utter indifference of the local inhabitants, until, with a clatter of hoofs and a flurry of Republic gunshots, the tattered group reached the Town Hall. Shucking their long white dusters, the adventurers pushed their way through throngs of movie and video-mad festival goers, and made their way inside ...

Seriously, though, it was great to see some old friends again -- festival organizers John Schedler and Nelson Frank, pulp expert John F. Roy from Ridgetown, and bookman Michael Keller from Walkerton -- and take part in the greatest little festival around.

Among the films we got a chance to see was The Vanishing American, a 1925 silent with Richard Dix, Lois Wilson and Noah Beery, which traced the history of Indians of the Southwest over the centuries, with particular emphasis on the white man's mistreatment of 20th century Indians who, despite the raw deal they are getting, still volunteer to fight overseas during World War I. The most astonishing thing about The Vanishing American, though, was its several scenes filmed in Monument Valley which we always thought John Ford had discovered as a movie location when he made Stagecoach almost 15 years later. The director of The Vanishing American, incidentally, was George B. Seitz.

Another film treat was a brand new 16mm print, projected on the big screen, of that immortal swashbuckler, The Adventures of Robin Hood with Errol Flynn, Basil Rathbone, Olivia de Havilland, Claude Rains, Alan Hale and all the rest. I first saw that film when I was a kid, but, even though I'd seen it a number of times since, including a black-and-white theatrical reissue in the late 40s, it was almost like seeing it for the first time, watching it up there on the big screen at Wingham. Thanks to all concerned for a thoroughly enjoyable time.